

Editorial

By HELEN T. ATKINSON

For The Times

Five in Fairbanks and an oldtimer in Alaska and 36 years in Interior Alaska. I ended the haul-road hearing (by the Alaska Growth Policy Council) in Fairbanks, would like to make some observations in aid of keeping the haul road open to the public.

Alaska is a land of young people. About 1 of those present at the Fairbanks hearing (March 22) were young people in their twenties and thirties. Many of them are new to Alaska. Some were not. Many of them own no property and pay no taxes; some have a few wanted to keep the haul road open. They maintained it would cost too much to keep the 360-mile segment from the Yukon River to Prudhoe Bay open; also that oil companies wanted the road kept closed.

However, Charles T. Ketter, Atlantic Richfield's North Slope project manager, said in Fairbanks last month that ARCO's whole program would have been thrown two years behind schedule if key 1975-cargo oil hadn't been delivered. Some 60,000 tons was stored by rail and road from Seward and Prudhoe (when 15 barges didn't make it to Prudhoe last fall) to Fairbanks, then over the road to Prudhoe — approximately 4,000 miles.

British Petroleum, in testimony submitted to the Fairbanks meeting, said they expected to supply through 1978, and 100 truckloads through 1985. BP asked that the road be kept open at least until 1985.

To get oil ready to flow in the Alyeska line, completion of production facilities at Prudhoe Bay had to be shipped in 1976 and 1977. To arrive on time to meet deadlines, King and Mother Nature may again conspire to block the sealift.

After the Alyeska line is finished ARCO will still have to keep drilling production wells. To produce 1.2 million barrels of oil a day will take 120 wells averaging 10,000 bpd. Any well does not produce 10,000. ARCO is providing half, or 500,000 and BP the other half. ARCO and BP are operators of the Prudhoe Bay field for themselves, Exxon, Shell and nine other oil companies. The Prudhoe field occupies only 1 per cent of the 3 million acres comprising the North Slope.

Wants Haul Road Kept Open

It will cost ARCO and BP together approximately \$4 billion to get 1.2 billion bpd "on line". It cost the oil industry an estimated \$1.5 billion for leases, exploration and surveys on the Slope through 1970. Part of the \$7 billion cost of the pipeline includes the haul road, as well as gravel parking areas, building and storage pads, airstrips, sewer and water systems, and lodging facilities. Job opportunities in Alaska have been provided by the petroleum industry.

Many of the young people in the state today wouldn't be here if it weren't for the petroleum industry. Nor would they be here if it weren't for the Alaska Highway, which some admitted they drove over to get here. Still, they want to keep others out and from driving north to see the Arctic Ocean, midnight sun, tundra, Brooks Range and all those things other Alaskans and tourists would like to see.

Guides and hunters who have airplanes and native corporations who own land rich in resources do not want the road open. They've said so. They don't want competition. They want to keep the land for themselves. Others, especially the newest Alaskans, reiterate that people (which they don't seem to consider themselves to be) will despoil and litter the road to Prudhoe Bay. They claim it would be impossible to patrol or control the road, even with check points. They say it will cost more to maintain the road than the state could ever derive from its use.

Isn't that true of other roads in Alaska — to Eagle, Circle, Hope, Haines, Teller, Miles & Childs' Glaciers, Mendenhall Glacier, even into McKinley Park — which so far is Alaska's only road, accessible park and open just four months of the year. It is especially true of the Alaska Marine Highway system, which is famous for the millions of dollars it loses every year, the Wickersham fiasco and the Columbia groundings. Should it be eliminated? Shut down?

Direct revenue to the state from road-use taxes or tolls isn't the only thing that should be considered. A road generates business, essential to a healthy economy. Without it there would be no need for drivers, mechanics, garages, hotels, restaurants, parts suppliers and those people who ship lumber, pipe, cement, machinery, food, etc. Everything would have to be shipped by sea or air.

By sea or river, delivery time is limited to six or eight weeks of summer in the Arctic. The only seaport in Alaska with an airstrip big enough for 747s is Anchorage. Should the rest of Alaska be bypassed? Already there have been proposals to fly cargo via 747 direct from Seattle and Glasgow, Mont., to the Slope — bypassing all of Alaska.

Some of the young and some of the new people to Alaska feel that the state should be bypassed and kept totally undeveloped. Tin, copper, gold and petroleum in the North should not be shared with other states or countries, no matter what their need. Some maintain that villages along the 360-mile long haul-road would suffer. They don't seem to know that there are no villages on the haul road, except for Wiseman — an old mining town with a population of six. The closest native village is 30 miles upriver from the Yukon Bridge — Stevens Village.

Some expressed concern about the natives. Only two were visible at the Fairbanks meeting, attended by more than 200 people. One read a resolution asking that the road be kept closed.

The land within the pipeline corridor is mainly owned by the state and federal government, but native land selections border the corridor and will encompass every good fishing, hunting and natural resource area not already in private hands. The natives will be the largest private land owners in Alaska when they get title to their 40 million acres. The natives do not want others hunting or trespassing on land they feel belongs only to people of Eskimo, Aleut or Indian extraction. They do not want easements across their land. They have publicly stated so.

Those naturalists who want to build log cabins and live in the wilderness by hunting or fishing, on food stamps, welfare checks, money from home or other non-paycheck means, don't want any lateral roads ever built from the haul road. They feel Alaska's mineral and petroleum resources should be locked up for at least 50 to 100 years. They advocate a five-to-seven-year moratorium on the road — to keep it closed while an impact study is made.

Meantime, the road which exists and was built to state secondary standards is in good condition. It will deteriorate if it is closed. Millions of dollars worth of gravel was placed for the road, pads for parking, storage, air-

strips, etc. Sewer and water systems were installed and are in use at 11 sites along the haul road — Five Mile, Old Man, Prospect Creek, Coldfoot, Dietrich, Chandalar, Atugun, Galbraith Lake, Toolik, Happy Valley and Franklin Bluffs. Alyeska agreed to remove all facilities after the pipeline is completed in 1977, unless further use can be found for them.

Alyeska is obligated to take out all facilities. This includes petroleum storage tanks, garages, warehouses, communication systems, incinerators, water and sewage treatment plants, kitchens, laundries, first aid stations, sleeping and dining rooms and recreation facilities. If the road is closed and facilities removed — it is rumored that Alyeska may burn them as it would cost too much to transport them back to the Lower 48 — how much would it cost to rebuild lodging and life-system support five or seven years hence?

It seems it would be much wiser to pursue existing facilities at a greatly reduced, rock-bottom price. The state, the federal government or the native corporations might benefit by such a move. Then the taxpayers of Alaska wouldn't have to pay two and three times over for the same thing.

Let's be realistic. The Alaska Growth Policy Council is actually making an impact study right now. They are incorporating verbal and written testimony on the haul-road and its impact on people. For the past six years the federal and state government have been involved in studying impact along the pipeline route, which is the same as the haul-road route. Alyeska has produced reams of material — so have the oil companies — on kinds of fish, birds, and animals up and down the pipeline corridor. They know caribou migration patterns, what the weather is like, when falcons nest and where, what to expect during different seasons, how to conquer and tame permafrost, what artifacts were used by people who inhabited the land thousands of years ago, and dozens of other things — it has all been cataloged and documented.

Who can possibly predict what will happen in Juneau or Fairbanks or the North Slope in the future? Why not treat the haul road like any other road in Alaska? After all, the pipeline travels along a highway for 900 miles — not just the 360 from the Yukon River to Prudhoe Bay. The rest of the road is open to the public. Why not the last 300 miles?

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